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Wu-Tang Clan's 'Shaolin' Was Barred From Release Until 2103. How Is A Group Now Selling It For \$1?

Days after suing Martin Shkreli, the group that owns the legendary album says it's "being offered to the public." That's sort of true.

By [Bill Donahue](#) | Jun 14, 2024





Wu-Tang Clan
Kyle Christy/Courtesy of Live Nation

The blockchain group [that sued Martin Shkreli](#) to stop him from releasing [Wu-Tang Clan's](#) *Once Upon a Time in Shaolin* is itself now selling the famed one-of-a-kind album to the public. But the deal comes with one small catch: buyers can't actually listen to most of it.

Days after suing the infamous Pharma Bro, PleasrDAO announced Thursday (June 13) that *Shaolin* was “finally being offered to the public” for just \$1 — something of a shocking offer considering the album’s infamous contractual restrictions that say it cannot be widely released until the year 2103.

But the fine print was slightly less exciting: Buyers will only receive an “encrypted” version of *Shaolin* that they cannot actually listen to. The deal will instead unlock exclusive access to a five-minute audio “sampler” composed of pieces of five tracks; the rest of the album will remain sealed.

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In a phone interview with *Billboard* on Thursday, members of PleasrDAO confirmed those limitations: "What people are being offered is the ability to own the encrypted album that they cannot listen to," said Pleasr's **Leighton Cusack**. "That will immediately unlock a never-heard-before sampler from the album created by the co-producer of the album."

Rather than the limitations, Pleasr stressed the other unique element of its sale: Every time someone buys the album, the group says it will reduce the waiting period for the full album's release by 88 seconds. "It creates this ability for people to decide how much they value music and if they want to have this music released faster or not," Cusack said.

The sale of any amount of *Shaolin*, an album famous (and expensive) for its exclusivity, raises big questions. Even if Pleasr's sale only allows buyers to hear five minutes of the album's material, wouldn't the widespread digital release flout Wu-Tang's famed restrictions? How is it possible?

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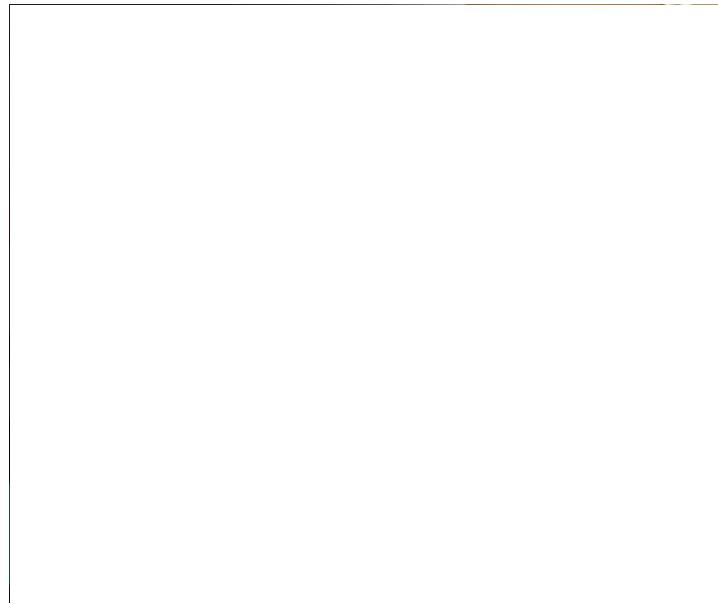
One possibility is that Pleasr, which bought the album from federal prosecutors after Shkreli forfeited it as part of his 2017 securities fraud convictions, was never subject to those same crazy restrictions in the first place. Another explanation could be that the people who imposed those rules — Wu-Tang rapper [RZA](#) and producer Cilvaringz — consented to the project. In social media posts, Pleasr said it had been “working with the original artists and producer” on the sale, suggesting Wu-Tang gave a green light to the project.

Reps for the Wu-Tang Clan did not return requests for comment on their involvement in the project. A press release from Pleasr on Thursday included a quote from RZA and Cilvaringz, but it was excerpted from a statement the duo had released a decade ago.

When asked directly if *Shaolin*'s stipulations were still in effect, or if the sale complied with those requirements, Pleasr representative **Camilla McFarland** declined to go deep into the details: “We can’t necessarily discuss the specifics of those agreements and where that all stands, but we can assure you that all of our activities and releases are fully compliant with the consent and blessing of artists and right holders involved,”

she said.

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Wu-Tang's legendary album was recorded in secret and published just once, on a CD secured in an engraved nickel and silver box. Though the group intended the bizarre

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spiked the price of crucial AIDS medications — bought it at auction for \$2 million.

After Shkreli was convicted of securities fraud in 2017, he forfeited the album to federal prosecutors to help pay his multi-million dollar restitution sentence. Please then bought the album from the government in 2021 for \$4 million, and in 2024 acquired the copyrights and other rights to the album for another \$750,000.

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When it was initially sold, *Shaolin* came with much-discussed stipulations — namely, that the one-of-a-kind album could not be released to the general public until 2103. Though the deal did permit for-profit listening events at museums and other small venues, it strictly forbade duplicating or otherwise exploiting *Shaolin* “for any commercial or other non-commercial purposes by any means today known or that come to be known during said time period.”

While Shkreli was certainly bound by those terms, it’s less clear if Pleasr was subjected to them when it purchased the album from prosecutors. The original 2015 deal contained a specific provision that, in the event the album was re-sold, the same kooky restrictions must be passed along to the new buyer. But it’s unclear if that requirement survived the album being forfeited as part of a criminal case.

Until Thursday’s digital sale, Pleasr’s use of the album had seemingly stayed within the bounds of the Wu-Tang’s restrictions, with only a series of small in-person events. Last month, the group announced an exhibit at an Australian museum, where fans would be able to “experience” certain songs. And this past weekend, it held a private listening event at the Angel Orensanz Foundation in New York City.

But the new sale would appear to clearly exceed those original rules. Copying the original CD into a digital format and then selling copies across the internet would hardly seem to fit the contract's original approved venues: "Buyer's home, museums, art galleries, restaurants, bars, exhibition spaces, or other similar spaces not customarily used as venues for large musical concerts."

One obvious way for Pleasr to avoid the restrictions would be for the selling party that reached the deal with Shkreli to simply waive their rights to enforce the contract. In a copy of the original agreement attached to the recent lawsuit, the deal was signed by RZA (Robert Diggs) as the founder/chief executive of Wu-Tang Productions, Inc., and by Cilvaringz (Tarik Azzougarh).

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When asked if such consent had been granted, Pleasr's McFarland said: "At the end of the day, I'll let [RZA] comment on any of that. But of course, we've been working with them in order to be able to bring this to life."

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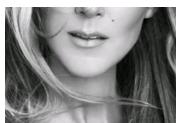
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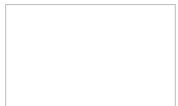
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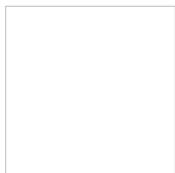
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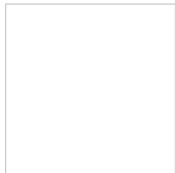
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The couple announced they are expecting their first child together in the spring.

By [Rania Anifto](#) | 5h

Hailey Bieber is gearing up for motherhood, and the model opened up about her pregnancy journey for a new [W Magazine](#) cover story.

"I probably could have hid it until the end, but I didn't enjoy the stress of not being able to enjoy my pregnancy outwardly," she explained of announcing her pregnancy at the six-month mark. "I felt like I was hiding this big secret, and it didn't feel good. I wanted the freedom to go out and live my life."

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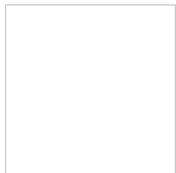


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